

Exploring Jeremiah



Strategies for Teaching the Hebrew Scriptures
Shawn Michael Smith

Exploring **Jeremiah**

Strategies for Teaching the Hebrew Scriptures

Strategies for Teaching the Hebrew Scriptures

Exploring Abraham

Exploring the Law of Moses

Exploring Joshua

Exploring the Judges

Exploring Saul, David, and Solomon

Exploring Jeremiah

Exploring the Exile in Babylon

Exploring the Wisdom Books

Exploring **Jeremiah**

Strategies for Teaching the Hebrew Scriptures

by **Shawn Michael Smith**

**Saint Mary's Press
Christian Brothers Publications
Winona, Minnesota**

The publishing team included Barbara Allaire, development editor; Rosemary Broughton and Donnarae Lukitsch Barrett, consulting editors; Rita Rae Kramer, manuscript editor; Holly Storkel, typesetter; MacLean and Tuminelly, design agency; Steve Michaels, illustrator; pre-press, printing, and binding by the graphics division of Saint Mary's Press.

The scriptural quotations in this book are from the New American Bible. Copyright © 1970 by the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Washington, DC. Used with permission.

Copyright © 1990 by Saint Mary's Press, Terrace Heights, Winona, MN 55987. All rights reserved. Permission is granted to reproduce only those materials intended for distribution to the students. No other part of this manual may be reproduced by any means without the written permission of the publisher.

Printed in the United States of America

Printing: 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Year: 1996 95 94 93 92 91 90

ISBN 0-88489-218-2

Contents

<u>INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES</u>	7
---	---

ACTIVITY 1

Seeing Through the Eyes of Jeremiah the Prophet

Overview	13
Teacher's Background	14
Procedures	15

Handouts

A. Jeremiah: A Prophet at War	18
-------------------------------------	----

ACTIVITY 2

Rehearsing Real-life Confrontations

Overview	22
Teacher's Background	23
Procedures	25

Handouts

B. How to Confront: Creating Rehearsals	29
---	----

<u>FOR FURTHER READING</u>	31
----------------------------------	----

INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

Strategies for Teaching the Hebrew Scriptures

The Series: A Variety of Uses

This manual is one of eight books in the series *Strategies for Teaching the Hebrew Scriptures*, which offers activities for high school students on the following topics:

1. Abraham
2. The Law of Moses
3. Joshua
4. The Judges
5. Saul, David, and Solomon
6. Jeremiah
7. The Exile in Babylon
8. The Wisdom Books (Proverbs and Job)

Each book describes one or two comprehensive, in-depth activities that are intended to challenge young people and bring them into contact with the lives and concerns of the ancient Israelite communities in which the Hebrew Scriptures received their inspiration. The activities are freestanding; that is, they do not depend on your students' having done any of the other activities in the series. Naturally, a familiarity with one topic's activities will enhance understanding of the others.

The series can be used in a number of ways:

- Taken as a whole, it could comprise the backbone of a course on the Hebrew Scriptures.
- It can supplement a textbook or lectures on the Hebrew Scriptures.
- Parts of the series could be used for a one-day workshop or a retreat program.
- With some advance preparation, a substitute teacher could use an activity to help make substitute sessions rewarding and stimulating.
- The activities can serve as models that can help teachers learn how to create their own classroom learning activities.

High School Students and the Hebrew Scriptures: A Challenging Combination

Teaching the Scriptures—particularly the Hebrew Scriptures—to high school students can be especially challenging for at least two reasons.

Nothing in common? Many young people—who probably have been exposed to the stories of Adam and Eve, Noah's ark, Moses' parting of the Red Sea, and the miraculous fall of

Jericho's walls—may believe that the Scriptures have little to do with their own experience, life-style, and approach to life. Typically, they find it hard to identify with what happens in the scriptural stories, which often show God's intentions communicated simply and directly through miracles, divine commands, and angelic messengers. Contemporary young people know that for them, life is a complex and confusing business of balancing impulses, peer pressures, and adult demands. The life of their ancient religious forebears may seem to them incredibly simple and unrealistic by comparison.

Young people are not likely to take the Hebrew Scriptures seriously if they feel that a great divide separates the world in which God's activity was once obvious from their own fast-changing, sometimes bewildering world. Sensing that in "real life" we play by different rules, they might casually dismiss the thousands of years of revelation and insight accumulated in the scriptural tradition.

Between childhood and maturity: As adolescents, our students are midway between childhood and adulthood. Growing physically in spurts and bursting organically into new intellectual powers, they try on adult capabilities like large, loose-fitting overcoats. They debate with adults; they earn money; they drive cars; they fall in love. They wonder what their new and more autonomous self will be like when fully developed. Will they be accepted? even admired? The pendulum of their identity swings back and forth between assertiveness and need for approval, between self-reliance and childlike dependence.

In the midst of this often turbulent inner conflict and self-absorption, our students are asked to consider something that is beyond both the childhood self that they have not yet relinquished and the adult self that they have not yet become—something that transcends self altogether. They are asked to believe in God.

If students see the Bible—which we say reveals God to us—as a storybook filled with wondrous tales, it may become part of the blanket of childhood credulousness that they are trying to throw off. The young people are thus put in the position of having to choose between faith and intelligence. Faced with this dilemma, some young people just avoid the issue entirely until much later in life when the basic questions of their own identity have been settled—and some never get back to the issue at all.

To help our students overcome both their alienation from the Scriptures and their fear of the message of transcendence, we can show them how the Hebrew Scriptures relate to them:

- how the Scriptures can be part of their adolescent experience of struggling to find their own path through the complex, often confusing world they inhabit
- how the Scriptures address their needs
- how the Scriptures speak to their own spiritual conditions

If scriptural study can validate students' new-found powers and give them confidence in themselves, such study can then ask them to believe in something beyond themselves.

The series *Strategies for Teaching the Hebrew Scriptures* aims for just such an approach to scriptural study for young people. The activities included under the eight topics in the series demonstrate for our students the credibility of the Hebrew Scriptures and unfold for them the possibility of an intelligent faith. The Scriptures, after all, have come to grips with ordinary human nature and have taken into account both the limitations and the potentialities of daily life in any age. An assertion implicit in the Scriptures is that the divinity that transcends human history also sparkles immanently within it.

The Hebrew Scriptures: A Distillation of Historical Experiences

How do the activities in this series accomplish their goal of unfolding for the students the possibility of an intelligent, relevant faith that is rooted in the Scriptures?

Most significantly, the activities take an approach to the Scriptures that respects the historical process of their development. This approach, grounded in modern historical-critical scholarship, is based on the assumption that God was revealed not simply through direct propositions handed down to humanity and recorded as the words of the Scriptures but more so through events played out in all of the ambiguity of particular historical circumstances. In other words, revelation happened in the very human, muddy, complex process of events through which a nomadic people became united and faithful to the One God. The dynamics that we recognize in human affairs today whether interpersonal, cross-cultural, political, or national—were also at work in this people's process of becoming, and in that

process the Israelites gradually came to see the hand of God. In many cases, it took centuries for scriptural communities down through generations to retrospectively discern the role that God had played in their decisive historical moments and for the meanings they discovered to take written form in the Scriptures.

In reviewing the long process of the emergence of monotheism among the Israelite people, it is possible to distinguish several phases through which a given significant historical experience could have passed, on its way to taking final written form as a text that we recognize today in the Hebrew Scriptures:

1. In the first phase, a decisive historical moment affects the Israelites' condition as a people. For instance:

- A nomadic tribe discovers a vast new land in which to grow and flourish (Abraham's call to Canaan).
- A group of enslaved tribes become liberated (the Exodus).
- Several isolated tribes form an alliance (Joshua's covenant at Shechem).
- The tribal federation becomes a nation (the establishment of David's monarchy).

In each of these instances, the people become more than they had been before.

2. In a second phase, a historical moment some time later than the first, the people grasp the significance and meaning of the original historical moment. These times—occasions of commemorating, celebrating, and storytelling—are experiences of unity. The people become aware of having been blessed and aided by something or Someone beyond their human capabilities. These are perceptions of the transcendent.

3. During a third phase, the oral traditions about the historical event and the animating spirit of the celebrations commemorating it are distilled into scriptural texts that describe the original experience.

4. In many cases, decades or usually centuries later—whenever the flow of history brings the people to a new event that is in the same spirit as the one already chronicled in a scriptural text—the storyteller or writer revamps the scriptural story to suit the nation's new spiritual crisis.

For instance, because many parts of the Hebrew Scriptures were collected, rewritten,

and even written down for the first time during the Babylonian exile (587–537 B.C.E.), the pivotal exile experience provides the lens through which much of the people's earlier history is interpreted.

Through this complex developmental process, the scriptural texts developed layers of meaning, and the scriptural tradition continued to serve as a scaffolding or brace to support the spirit of the people. Like a trellis, the Scriptural tradition enabled the vine to grow on and on.

The Activities: A Process of Discovery

The activities in this series aim at bringing the students back in time to ancient Israel in order to have them discover and even enter into the process by which the Scriptures came into being. These activities are experiential in the sense that they enable the students to appreciate, through classroom experience, something of what moved and inspired the people of scriptural times.

Theologically, the intention of these activities is to influence the students toward a shift of expectations. Instead of seeing in the Bible only a God who intervenes from outside of humanity, the students may begin to look for God within the history of their own spiritual development, as did the scriptural Hebrew communities. They may discover God present in the issues and concerns of their own adolescent life, just as the ancient Israelites found God in the crises and decisive moments of their development as a people, even within their flawed and weak moments. Rather than approaching the Bible as an object that is sacred but outside them, the students may come to understand it as the intimate record of a people's faith journey that is not unlike their own struggle to grow into adulthood.

You may notice several features of these activities that make them apt tools for discovery:

- *Students:* The activities are student-centered; that is, the principal players are the students, not the teacher. Because the activities focus on small-group tasks, the students themselves assume responsibility for their own learning, with the teacher acting as a guide or facilitator. Together, the teacher and the students become sharers in an intellectual adventure.
- *Handouts:* The activities rely on handouts, which give the students the information and directions they will need in order to carry out the tasks assigned to them.

- **Strengths in the group:** The students quickly learn that they need to mobilize their group's resources to accomplish the tasks, capitalizing on the strengths in the group: one may be a better reader; another, a problem-solver; one may have a dramatic flair that is called for by the task; one may be a leader who gets the other members moving and keeps them on track; another, a synthesizer who can combine the best ideas in the group and build consensus around them. The strengths and capabilities that come to light in the small-group work can amaze even teachers who think they know their students well.
- **Challenges:** The tasks assigned are challenging; the students will know that they are not being given "busy work." They have a specific amount of time in which to finish their task, so there is a certain sense of urgency, a charged atmosphere, as the students' energies flow toward the finish line.
- **A dawning process:** The "point" of a given activity is usually not disclosed to the students at the outset. It is something that dawns on them gradually as they work their way through the tasks and the wrap-up at the end. In fact, the dawning process may go on long after a session or even after the course has ended, as the students find echoes of their classroom experiences in their everyday life.

Using This Manual

Elements of the Activities

The activities contain these elements:

1. Question: The question gives you, the teacher, a quick idea of the issue addressed by the activity. It is not necessary to read this to the students at the outset because in some cases the question implies the point of the activity. You will want the students to discover this point later, as they work through the activity.

2. Goal: The goal describes an outcome that you will look for in the students. Again, do not read them the goal at the outset or you may give away the point that you want them to discover in the process of doing the activity.

3. Summary of the activity: The summary tells how many sessions you will need for the activity and gives a brief sketch of the activity.

4. Teacher's background: Background material is included as an aid to understanding the activity and the tasks required of the students. It is primarily for *your* insight, not the students'. Unless the procedure for the activity calls for you to refer to parts of this background with the students, do not lecture this material to them; instead use it as a resource for answering the students' questions and facilitating their discoveries during and at the close of the activity. The background material is generally too scholarly for the students' needs, but it is essential for your own understanding. If you want further background, consult the bibliography at the end of this manual.

5. Procedures: This section gives you the step-by-step procedures to follow as you lead the activity, including what to do before the sessions and during the sessions as well as assignments to give when appropriate.

6. Handouts: The activities are actually driven by the students' handouts. They contain crucial information or imaginative accounts of scriptural times as well as instructions for doing the tasks assigned. Some handouts are for all students; some are only for group leaders or for actors in a skit. This will vary from activity to activity. You will need to set aside time to photocopy the appropriate number of handouts before class. You may want to give group leaders their handouts at an earlier session so that they can read them in advance. If you do this, tell the leaders not to share the contents of the handouts with other students ahead of time. Also, bring extra copies of the leaders' handouts in case they forget to bring them to the session.

7. Teacher's supplements: In a few activities, there are supplements for the teacher—resources that the teacher can use to enhance the activity. You do not need to make copies for the students.

Tips on Leading Activities

The following considerations can help you in leading the activities:

Orienting yourself: To orient yourself to an activity, first recognize that the materials and procedures for the activity fit together like pieces

of a puzzle. You will need to read every part of the activity at least twice in order to see how the puzzle pieces fit together. The handouts are key pieces of the activity, so read them first.

Your directive role: As teacher, you will exercise a directive role and a consultative role. In your directive role, you will assign and explain the tasks of the activity. Be clear about the directions. If needed, sketch on the chalkboard what is expected of the students. Make sure your oral and chalkboard directions match the directions in their handouts. Give specific time limits, but be flexible about extending the limit if the students are working well.

Your consultative role: In this role, you will check with groups and individuals to make sure they are clear about their task and are on track and reasonably on schedule. Offer advice or explanation where needed, and be sensitive to the possibility that a given student may feel alienated in a group and need to change groups. Generally, for motivational reasons it is best to let students choose their own groups, but occasionally this does not work out.

Noise: The more fully these activities engage the students and the livelier their creativity, the more noise you are likely to hear. Allow necessary noise and fruitful chaos as long as your students do not disturb other classrooms. Subdued murmurs and long silences probably indicate that the students are either confused or unwilling to do the task. In either case, stop the process and talk through the reasons for their hesitancy with the students.

Grades: Grades may be given for tasks if the students seem to require the added incentive or control that grades can bring. Usually, one grade can be assigned to each small group, with each member getting the same grade. Because these activities try to promote involvement with the Scriptures, the grade should reflect the effort the group put into their project and the extent to which they follow directions, rather than their knowledge of objective content. Because most small groups enjoy the activities and consequently do their work as they should, the grades are generally higher than normal for classroom projects. In any case, do not make the grades competitive, such that one student's or group's success depends on another's failure.

Conclusion: Teacher-as-Artist

A popular adage of unknown origin gives us this bit of wisdom:

- The student plays the instrument.
- The musician plays the tune.
- The artist plays the audience.

There seems to be a similar progression in the field of teaching. Maybe it is this:

- The inexperienced teacher teaches the material.
- The experienced teacher teaches the ideas behind the material.
- The teacher-as-artist reveals the students to themselves through the ideas and the material.

Actually, most of us hope that our students will do more than just acquire knowledge in our classes. Consciously or unconsciously, we are always angling for a response from them, constantly leading them out of a narrower frame of reference and into a broader frame of reference, steadily helping them to become more than they have been. In this way we teachers are growth catalysts, agents of transcendence.

We should therefore be comfortable with the possibility of transcendence during these learning activities. Moments when the classroom becomes a "community" and individual students experience self-discovery parallel the times when the scriptural Hebrew communities more clearly realized their national identity and their special relationship with God. How much the divine is present to these revelatory moments in our own classrooms perhaps none of us is qualified to say. But we can witness, and we can wonder.

ACTIVITY 1

Seeing Through the Eyes of Jeremiah the Prophet

Overview

Question: What kind of vision did Jeremiah feel compelled to offer to his fellow Judahites before the exile?

Goal: That the students appreciate the moral vision of the prophet Jeremiah when he confronted the society of pre-exilic Jerusalem.

Prophecy is often popularly understood as the ability to predict future events. Unless informed otherwise, many students (and adults as well) would imagine the biblical prophets as ancient palm readers or crystal-ball gazers—amazing, esoteric, abnormal. They might think of prophets like Jeremiah as cranky clairvoyants whose super-human gift of seeing the future sets them apart from ordinary humanity. It is hard for students to imagine that the prophetic experience might have something to do with their own life.

This activity encourages the students to think of prophecy as the application of a clear moral vision to situations that others see through the filters of fear and self-interest. Likewise, the students are introduced to the notion that Jeremiah (like all genuine prophets) was called to *confront* the clouded visions of others with his own God-given moral vision.

The activity emphasizes that faithfulness to the vision and the courage to confront, rather than predictive skills, are essential to prophecy. This understanding of prophecy can open up in the students' minds the possibility that a prophetic dimension exists in all of human experience, even in their own life.

Summary of the Activity (One session)

1. Without receiving any background on the prophets, the students define the word *prophet* on index cards.
2. The students answer questions that relate Jeremiah's experiences to the students' own experiences.
3. The teacher conducts a follow-up discussion with the class, based on true-false questions about Jeremiah's prophetic role.
4. The students again define the word *prophet* on index cards in light of their broadened understanding of the role of the prophet.
5. The teacher leads a guided fantasy meditation that helps the students to recognize "the prophet" within their own heart.

Teacher's Background

The Book of Jeremiah has long been regarded by scriptural scholars as an autobiographical narrative or "confessions" of a single pre-exilic prophetic figure, Jeremiah. However, among scholars today there is increasing suspicion that the book is instead the distillation of a post-exilic prophetic tradition. But even if the book was formed among synagogue communities after the exile rather than dictated directly by Jeremiah to the scribe Baruch, the tradition would still have developed around the communal memory of a real, historical person.

Confrontation Out of a Moral Vision

The overall thrust of the activity is to give the students a realistic perspective on prophetic confrontation coming out of a moral vision as it seems to have operated in ancient times. According to scriptural accounts, prophecy developed as a counterbalance to kingship somewhat the way the legislative branch of a modern democracy counterbalances the executive branch. Prophecy, therefore, played itself out in the realm of governmental decision-making, not at the level of tearrooms, tarot cards, and Ouija boards.

The activity's strategy of making a point-for-point comparison between ancient and modern times is an attempt to suggest for the students the kind of dark power that Jeremiah went up against. If the students can discern somewhere in today's culture a political power or even a majority sentiment that is willing to squash its opposition by unscrupulous or underhanded means, they can comprehend the danger that Jeremiah faced and the intensity of the prophetic word that was his driving motivation.

Jeremiah's Challenge to a Corrupt Monarchy

In 601 B.C.E. the tiny nation of Judah defied the Babylonian empire by refusing to pay tax tribute any longer. The kingly court that held sway in Jerusalem at that time was a political faction that consistently ignored the common good of Judah as a nation. On its throne sat Jehoiakim, a Judahite who had been installed in 609 B.C.E. by

Egyptian Pharaoh Necho II and who shaped foreign policy more toward Egypt's benefit than toward Judah's security. Domestically, the Jehoiakim administration's policy was nothing short of exploitation.

According to the Scriptures, Jeremiah addressed the ruler and privileged classes of the Jehoiakim regime with undisguised contempt:

Woe to him [Jehoiakim] who builds his
house on wrong,
his terraces on injustice;
Who works his neighbor without pay,
and gives him no wages. . . .
The burial of an ass shall he be given,
dragged forth and cast out
beyond the gates of Jerusalem.
(Jer. 22:13–19)

For there are among my people criminals;
like fowlers they set traps,
but it is men they catch.
Their houses are as full of treachery
as a bird-cage is of birds;
Therefore they grow powerful and rich,
fat and sleek.
They go their wicked way;
justice they do not defend
By advancing the claim of the fatherless
or judging the cause of the poor.
Shall I not punish these things? says the
LORD;
on such a nation such as this shall I not
take vengeance?
(Jer. 5:26–29)

You now who are doomed, what do you
mean
by putting on purple,
bedecking yourself with gold,
Shading your eyes with cosmetics,
beautifying yourself in vain? . . .
(Jer. 4:30)

As might be expected in any human society, Jeremiah's outspoken defiance of the reigning powers incurred for him severe retaliation. He was put in stocks, whipped, framed for treason, imprisoned, and sentenced to death. Sympathizers in high places rescued him from death, but they could not do as much for Uriah, a prophet like Jeremiah, who was hunted down and executed. The Judahite monarchy, meanwhile, sided with Egypt against Babylon and eventually brought destruction and exile down upon Judah by this foolish resistance to a powerful empire.

Prophetic Spirit for Today

All of this emphasis on the human side of Jeremiah's prophecy should incline the students to look more toward a courageous moral vision than toward esoteric clairvoyance and crystal-ball gazing for today's prophetic spirit. Perhaps Karen Silkwood, who died in a mysterious accident after calling attention to unsafe and illegal practices at the nuclear supply plant where she worked, and consumer advocate Ralph Nader are good present-day examples of that spirit. And maybe some students will recognize something in their own heart as a prophetic word aching to be spoken.

Procedures

Before the Session

1. Before planning for the activity, which can be completed in one session, read the materials that will be used:

- Handout A, "Jeremiah: A Prophet at War"

2. As an assignment before the session, have the students read 2 Kings 18:17 and 2 Kings 19:32–37, which tell the story of how (about one hundred years before Jeremiah's time) the angel of the Lord destroyed Assyrian King Sennacherib's army outside the walls of Jerusalem as it was preparing to attack the Judahites. Before the students read the assignment, explain to them what the passages are about. Tell them that the Judahites' memory of God's saving power in destroying the Assyrian army may account for their stubbornness in holding out so long against King Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian army a century later, despite Jeremiah's dire prophetic warnings.

The Session

1. Distribute a 3-by-5-inch index card to each student. Direct the students to write their name and a definition of the word *prophet* on the card. Privately, while the students are working on the handout described in step 2 below, count how many of the definitions include the notion of *moral vision* or *confrontation* versus the notion of *prediction*. If the students are not already familiar with the biblical prophets, they are apt to define a prophet in terms of prediction. Do not

comment on their definitions but take note of them for yourself in light of the definitions that the students will write at the end of the activity.

2. Distribute handout A, "Jeremiah: A Prophet at War." The handout contains twelve statements about the situation in Jerusalem that Jeremiah was addressing. Each statement leads into a question, most of which are multiple-choice. The questions can be answered by the students in any of these ways:

- The students can read the handout to themselves and answer the questions *individually* during the session.
- If the students' reading skill or stamina is not up to that much reading, have them work *in pairs* to answer the questions.
- Read through the handout with them *as a class* and have the students answer the questions privately in writing or orally in class discussion.

If you use either *a* or *b* above, ask the students to answer nine or ten questions rather than all of the questions, in order to keep the process moving.

The handout's statements and questions are designed to give information about pre-exilic Jerusalem and to highlight the dimensions of moral vision and confrontation that characterized Jeremiah's prophetic role. The questions encourage the students to identify with the story of Jeremiah, to speculate on what they would do in that situation, and to give subjective answers. The questions are not intended as an evaluation or grading tool because many of them simply ask the students to tell what they would do in Jeremiah's situation.

3. Whether you use method *a*, *b*, or *c* (in step 2), be sure to discuss the students' answers as a class. The following is a guide to answers to the questions for handout A:

- *Question 1:* Answer *a* is the position taken by most people, that of neither hero nor villain. Answer *b* was the position taken by Jeremiah's antagonists in Jerusalem. Answer *c* was the position taken by Jeremiah.
- *Question 2:* The answer to this question probably depends on society's mood regarding protest at the time the students do the activity.
- *Question 3:* The answer for each student will depend on her or his answer to question 1.
- *Question 4:* Undoubtedly more.
- *Question 5:* Answer *c* was the decision made by Jeremiah, but the students' answers, of course, should be whatever they honestly think they would do.

- *Question 6:* Answer *d* was Jeremiah's reaction, but again, the "right" answer for each student is the honest answer.
- *Question 7:* Answer *b* is closest to the historical event.
- *Question 8:* Answer *c* describes Jeremiah's action, but the "right" answer for each student is the honest answer.
- *Question 9:* The best answer is *c*. Chapter 20 of Jeremiah indicates how much he disliked opposing the people of his own country. He wanted to live happily, not to endure sorrow and pain; yet confronting the people of his society was sure to bring suffering.
- *Question 10:* Jeremiah's advice was unequivocal: surrender. Both answers *b* and *c* would be consistent with Jeremiah's advice, but each student has to answer honestly what he or she would do.
- *Question 11:* Answer *a* might express young people's fear of being unpopular. Answer *b* might express a perception that the Hebrew Scriptures portray a God who destroys enemies violently while the Christian Testament portrays a God who is victimized by enemies. Answer *c* is most consistent with the whole of the Book of Jeremiah.
- *Question 12:* Answer *c* may be warranted by all that is written in the Book of Jeremiah. However, an assessment of the motive of the leaders is bound to leave room for discussion—the more discussion the better.

4. The students should now be familiar with the story of Jeremiah from working on handout A, and they have had a chance to identify somewhat with Jeremiah's situation. As a follow-up and a way to bring together their new understandings of prophecy, conduct a discussion with the students around the following true-false propositions. The statements are formulated as true-false not necessarily to elicit a "correct" answer but to provoke the class into thinking together on the subject. Answers like "depends," "true in one sense and false in another," "partly true," and so on, are well in order. However, guidelines for answers are provided in brackets following each statement.

True or False

- a. *Because Jeremiah had predicted Jerusalem's destruction, it was going to happen no matter what anyone did.* [Jeremiah's predictions were based on the people's behavior. If the people's actions changed, so would the future. That is why he preached so hard—to prevent the destruction that was sure to come if people would not change.]
- b. *Predictions came into Jeremiah's mind unasked for, like unsolicited mail.* [What came into his mind unasked for was not predictions but a moral vision of all the mistakes his society was making and of what the inevitable consequences would be.]
- c. *The destruction that Jeremiah saw coming was only obvious. The people around him could not see it because their vision was clouded by fear and greed.* [Much about the Book of Jeremiah gives this impression. Jeremiah called his contemporaries
 . . . foolish and senseless people
 who have eyes and see not,
 who have ears and hear not.
 (Jer. 5:21)]
- d. *Jeremiah demonstrated that it is okay for religious prophets to get involved in politics.* [Jeremiah addressed himself to the wrongful beliefs and spirit out of which he saw Judah's foreign policy growing. This was an appropriate concern for a religious prophet, whereas the shifting schemes of political parties would not have been appropriate.]
- e. *If Jeremiah had not been so confrontational, his society would have taken him more seriously.* [Eventually, his society did take him seriously, because the exile proved him right. But if he had not been vindicated by the exile, the old proverb would have probably proved true in his case: ". . . 'A prophet is not without honor except in his native place . . .'" (Matt. 13:57).]
- f. *Jeremiah had a moral rather than a predictive vision.* [A moral vision was the essence of his prophetic gift. In chapter 23 of the Book of Jeremiah, he condemns all of the prophets whose vision is detached from moral integrity.]

5. To finish the discussion of Jeremiah's prophetic role and the meaning of prophecy, distribute blank 3-by-5-inch cards to the students and direct them to again write their name and a definition of the word *prophet*, using whatever insights about prophecy they have gained during the activity. You would expect that a greater number of students than in the beginning of the session would include the dimensions of *moral vision* and *confrontation* in their definition.

6. A relaxing, reflective meditation that puts the students in touch with their own inner prophetic voice would be a good way to end the session. They should settle into a comfortable

position, close their eyes, tense and then relax each group of muscles in turn: neck, back, legs, arms, toes, face, and so on. When they seem relaxed, take them on the following guided fantasy, reading slowly and calmly and pausing for a few seconds where indicated:

- Imagine that your whole person is a country. . . . The boundaries of this country are your toes, fingers, and head. . . . Inside the boundaries, the rivers flow with energy. A healthy trade economy rhythmically breathes in and out of the country. . . .

Imagine that the capital city of this country is your heart. . . . The heart is very important; it keeps everything moving. . . . Listen to your heart. . . . It is important, yet it is easily wounded. Many things from outside the country—criticism, pressure, failure, disappointment, misunderstanding—can spoil the heart's sense of well-being. . . .

So, around the heart there is an invisible wall. . . . What is this wall? . . . Try to feel or

see how the heart protects itself. . . . What makes up this wall? . . .

Deep inside the heart is a tiny voice saying what must be done to prepare for the future. . . . Everyone's heart has its own prophet. Is your prophet calling for changes? . . . Is your prophet being ignored, or imprisoned, or put to death? . . . What is your prophet saying? Listen carefully for a few seconds. . . . [Pause for about thirty seconds.]

In the Book of Jeremiah, the Lord says, ". . . I will place my law within them, and write it upon their hearts; I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer will they have need to teach their friends and kinsmen how to know the LORD. All, from least to greatest, shall know me . . ." (Jer. 31:33–34). . . .

Everyone, open your eyes.

Jeremiah: A Prophet at War

Read each of the twelve statements below and answer the question following it. For multiple-choice questions, circle the letter of your answer. For other questions, fill in the blanks.

1. Statement

Imagine that the country you live in is provoking a powerful enemy country. So far, the enemy country has done nothing but give your country warnings. But you are convinced that a war would mean many deaths on both sides and possibly a defeat for your country.

Question 1: *What would you do?*

- a. Nothing, what can I do?
- b. Join in; help drum up defiance of the other country. There is money to be made on war, and we know we can beat them.
- c. Stage a one-person antiwar demonstration.

2. Statement

The mood for war differs from time to time throughout history. In the 1940s, for example, U.S. citizens at home supported the war in Europe by rationing certain foods and commodities, by growing "victory gardens," and by collecting metal and rubber. But in the 1960s, there were active demonstrations against the war in Vietnam.

Question 2: *How would today's society treat someone who would choose answer c for question 1 above?*



3. Statement

Around 600 B.C.E. in the country of Judah, there was a strong national desire for revolt against the Babylonian Empire, to whom Judah had to pay taxes. But because Judah was so much smaller than Babylon, revolt could have meant national suicide. In the face of so much national rebelliousness, the prophet Jeremiah spoke as God had inspired him:

... If any nation or kingdom will not serve Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, or will not bend its neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon, I will punish that nation with sword, famine, and pestilence, says the LORD, until I give them into his hand. (Jeremiah 27:8)

Question 3: *Was Jeremiah's action like or unlike your decision in question 1 above?*

4. Statement

Unlike most modern societies, Jeremiah's society believed that to predict something is to make it happen. Among the ancients, words—especially a prophet's words—had the power to create reality. So Jeremiah's prediction of the possible destruction of Jerusalem greatly alarmed the people and drew this reaction:

When Jeremiah finished speaking all that the LORD bade him speak to all the people, the priests and prophets laid hold of him, crying, "You must be put to death!" (Jeremiah 26:8)

Question 4: *Did Jeremiah's protest of the rebellion against Babylon create more trouble or less trouble for him than staging an antiwar demonstration would create for someone in today's society?*

5. Statement

Imagine that you are a recognized religious leader with a large following in a rather immoral country. You notice that although your followers come to worship services conducted by you, they do not try to reform their moral behavior.

Question 5: *What would you do?*

- a. Just keep on doing my job. Pray, conduct services, and accept the offerings of my many followers.
- b. Say something about morality to my followers, but be careful and polite. Do not embarrass anyone.
- c. Let them have it! Shout loud and long about the self-destructive consequences of their hypocrisy.

6. Statement

Apparently, Jeremiah's fellow Judahites thought of Yahweh as merely the god who specializes in protecting their possession of the land. They thought that Yahweh would always keep their land safe from their enemies, including the Babylonians. Instead of observing God's moral laws, which would have united the country, they simply brought sacrificial offerings to Yahweh's Temple. Instead of constructing a wise foreign policy, they relied on the ancient superstition that no enemy could conquer Jerusalem because Yahweh's Temple was there. So right at the gates of the Temple, Jeremiah confronted worshippers with this prophecy from God:

Put not your trust in the deceitful words: "This is the temple of the LORD! The temple of the LORD! The temple of the LORD!" Only if you thoroughly reform your ways and your deeds; if each of you deals justly with his neighbor; if you no longer oppress the resident alien, the orphan, and the widow; if you no longer shed innocent blood in this place, or follow strange gods to your own harm, will I remain with you in this place, in the land which I gave to your fathers long ago and forever. (Jeremiah 7:4-7)

Because he spoke against the Temple, Jeremiah was given a whipping and then placed in the stocks.

Question 6: *If, like Jeremiah, you had been publicly punished for speaking out against religion and government, what would you do?*

- a. Decide to keep quiet in the future.
- b. Start to doubt myself. After all, how could I be right when the great majority of people disagree with me?
- c. Become an even tougher opponent of majority opinion.
- d. Decide nothing and just wait for the next "word" of the Lord.

7. Statement

In 597 B.C.E., the little nation of Judah refused to pay taxes to the great Babylonian Empire. This drew down the wrath of Babylon upon Judah's capital city, Jerusalem. Instead of destroying the city, though, Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian king, arrested Judah's King Jehoiachin, its princes, leading landowners, and skilled craftspeople. Nebuchadnezzar brought them all to Babylon to work for him, and this left great vacancies in Judah's leadership positions in Jerusalem.

Question 7: *From what you know of people in general, how do you think the people of Judah would have reacted to this new vacuum of leadership in their country?*

- a. They would have learned their lesson and paid taxes dutifully from that point on.
- b. Nothing would have changed much in Judah. The arrested leaders would have named their successors and caretakers before they left, and the new puppet king installed by the Babylonians would have kept order.
- c. With the old leaders gone, there would have been a mad scramble for the vacant positions of power and leadership.



8. Statement

If you had been in Judah in the years after the 597 B.C.E. exile, you would have seen the following:

- The middle-class citizens take over the leadership positions vacated by the upper class who have gone to Babylon.
- The new upper class, like the old upper class now exiled, also resent paying taxes to Babylon.
- The lower class, no longer protected by laws, do not strongly support their new leaders.

Question 8: *In this situation, what would you do?*

- a. Do the same as everyone else: Take advantage of all the new opportunities that have come about because of the absence of the old leaders. Try to get ahead and make some money. If Babylon still wants tax money, make them come and get it.
- b. Detach myself from the new leadership, which is making the same mistake as the old leadership. Find a hiding place for the day when Babylon gets angry again.
- c. Do what Jeremiah did: Warn the brash new leaders that they, too, like the old exiled leaders, are endangering the country.

9. Statement

Even though he had already been punished and threatened with death for criticizing his country, Jeremiah criticized the new leaders by prophesying what would happen to them:

Thereupon this word of the LORD came to me: . . . I will make them an object of horror to all the kingdoms of the earth, a reproach and a byword, a taunt and a curse, in all the places to which I will drive them. (Jeremiah 24:4–9)

Question 9: *What do you think of Jeremiah's outspoken reaction to the new leaders?*

- a. It was foolish. He must have been just a religious person who didn't know enough about the ways of the world to realize that he was bringing great danger upon himself with these words.
- b. It was self-destructive. He must have had a death wish. Shouldn't his earlier beating and public humiliation have taught him

that he was not strong enough to bring about the needed change?

- c. It was courageous. He must have had a firm conviction that this was what had to be said and that he was the one to say it, regardless of consequences for himself.

10. Statement

Then, nine years later, in 588 B.C.E., the following events occurred:

- A bold new pharaoh ascended the Egyptian throne.
- Depending on Egypt for military support, Judah revolted again against the Babylonian Empire.
- Within months, Babylonian troops were swarming over the land of Judah, driving the Judahites into hiding.
- The only major cities left unconquered in Judah were Azekah, Lachish, and Jerusalem.
- After Azekah fell, the Babylonian troops chopped down trees, piled wood high against the walls of Lachish, and set fire to the wood. Baked by the heat, the walls crumbled, and Lachish was conquered.
- The whole Babylonian army then descended upon Jerusalem.

Question 10: *If you had been one of Judah's leaders, hiding behind Jerusalem's walls and completely surrounded by a very angry and very clever army, what would you have advised?*

- a. Hold out. There are not enough trees around Jerusalem to provide the Babylonians sufficient firewood to burn through the city's walls. Besides, the Egyptians might come to the rescue. There is a source of water inside Jerusalem. The wealthy have plenty of food supplies. The poor will have to take care of themselves.
- b. Negotiate with the Babylonians. There is enough treasure in Jerusalem to buy the lives of the people from the conquerors waiting outside. But after the enemy goes back to Babylon, everyone in Jerusalem will be very poor.
- c. Let God decide the outcome. This will involve prayer, repentance for sin, care of the city's "welfare" cases, and listening to the true prophets, including Jeremiah, whose words might not be pleasant.

11. Statement

Jeremiah prophesied this message from God:

... He who remains in this city shall die by sword, or famine, or pestilence; but he who goes out to the Chaldeans [Babylonians] shall live; his life shall be spared him as booty, and he shall live." (Jeremiah 38:2)

Then Jeremiah was arrested and accused of treason. The princes of the people demanded that Jeremiah be put to death. Perhaps because no one dared to personally execute a prophet of God, Jeremiah was instead lowered by rope into the muddy bottom of a stone water-storage vat. There he would have died of starvation had not a man from Ethiopia pulled him up out of the pit. After that, he was kept in prison to prevent him from further frightening and upsetting the people.

Question 11: Often Jeremiah's prophecies begin with the phrase "the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah." It seems that "the word of the LORD" was not only a message but a strong impulse to speak out. What was the source of this "word"?

- a. This word must not have been from God because it made Jeremiah unpopular, got him punished by the authorities, and put his life in danger.
- b. This word was from the God of the Hebrew Scriptures era, who did not become loving until the Christian era.
- c. This word must have been from a loving God because it made Jeremiah willing to give his life for the good of his people.

12. Statement

The siege dragged on month after month. Bodies shriveled by starvation became walking skeletons. Infants cried for food, but there were no parents to feed them. In desperation, some Judahites even boiled human flesh for food. Yet the leaders refused to surrender to the Babylonians.

Finally, after a year and a half, the Babylonians broke through the walls. Their archers shot Judahite fighters; their foot soldiers chased the citizens through the streets; for a month the Babylonians plundered and burned the city. They executed the sons of Zedekiah, the acting king, before his very eyes and then blinded him. They brought the Judahites to exile in Babylon, but some poor people who had no property were left in Judah and were also given vineyards and farms.

Jeremiah was released from prison by the Babylonians and allowed to stay in Jerusalem.

Question 12: Why did the Judahite leaders let the siege last a whole year and a half? No one really knows, so take your best educated guess:

- a. *Human error:* The leaders thought that Egypt would come to their rescue. They might also have hoped that the Babylonians would just give up. Some remembered that one hundred years earlier, the Assyrian army that had surrounded Jerusalem had been struck down by a mysterious disease. Maybe Yahweh would intervene like that again.
- b. *Freedom and independence:* The leaders were freedom fighters like the North American revolutionaries.
- c. *Greed:* The whole issue for the Judahites seemed to revolve around taxes and property ownership. The wealthy Judahites did not want to pay taxes to Babylon. When the siege was finally over, the landless, poor peasants were left to tend the fields while the upper classes were taken off to Babylon (just like the exiles of ten years earlier).

ACTIVITY 2

Rehearsing Real-life Confrontations

Overview

Question: How can the ability to confront other people that is illustrated in the prophet Jeremiah's life enrich the personal lives of the students?

Goal: That the students are encouraged to confront others constructively when it is necessary in a conflict situation.

This activity will effectively follow up activity 1 of the Jeremiah topic because activity 1 describes Jeremiah the prophet as *confronting* the society of his day with a moral vision.

The element of confrontation is unmistakable in the Book of Jeremiah. This prophet, who thought he was too young to speak up and felt fearful of confronting others with what he saw as the truth, grew to become one of the most courageous figures of the Hebrew Scriptures once he felt prompted by God to speak of things that other people preferred not to hear. Jeremiah's unwanted message exemplifies the kind of inner truth that demands expression.

High school students are apt to suffer from a similar unwillingness to confront others with

their own inner truth. Though some young people may seem naturally argumentative, more often than not they do not speak up about perceived injustices done to them or about behaviors in others that cause problems for them. Typically they prefer to act as though nothing bothers them—in order to avoid the difficult moment of bringing up something they fear others will not want to hear.

This activity elicits from students some of the assertions they would like to make in their personal life but hesitate to make. By rehearsing a few situations of confrontation, they may gain the confidence to try confronting others where formerly they would have kept their truth locked up within themselves.

Summary of the Activity (Two Sessions)

1. To generate examples of conflict situations, the students anonymously submit brief written descriptions of conflicts about which they would like to confront someone but have not done so.
2. The students consider some aspects of Jeremiah's confrontiveness.
3. The teacher introduces a four-step method of confrontation.

4. In small groups, the students work on one of the conflict situations that were submitted earlier and write a script for a constructive confrontation. (Each group selects a different situation.)
5. Each group role-plays its situation, designating one of its members to confront a student from another group, who is chosen by the teacher.
6. The class discusses what happened in each confrontation and evaluates how the confronter handled it.
7. The activity closes with a discussion of how Jeremiah's confrontations compare with their own.

Teacher's Background

The Difficulty of Confronting

Directly confronting people does not come easily to most young people, or to adults for that matter. Indirect methods of dealing with conflict—sarcasm, mean gossip, passive withdrawal, resentment, or denying to oneself that there even is a conflict—are more typical of young people than are methods of direct confrontation.

For example, consider the following situations:

- A first-year high school student who is just beginning to prove himself academically in a challenging prep school has studied hard for an upcoming quiz. During the test, the questions seem easy to him, and he writes his answers with confidence. But when the grades are later announced by the teacher, he discovers to his astonishment that he has failed. Moreover, the teacher refuses to hand back the corrected quizzes. The boy does not know how to interpret his failure. Did he overlook part of the test or misunderstand some of the questions? Did he express his answers poorly? Did he fail to grasp the test material deeply enough? Is he too slow to survive in this school? Does the teacher dislike him? Fearing to antagonize the teacher by complaining to school authorities, he meekly resorts to confiding in a faculty member whom he especially trusts.

- A senior who is the only girl on her science project team enthusiastically proposes an idea to her teammates. Partly (if not entirely) because the idea has come from a girl, the male teammates hoot the idea down in derision. Intimidated, the girl backs away from her suggestion and throws her support behind someone else's proposal. Upon being evaluated, however, the group discovers that the best line of inquiry they could have pursued was the one originally proposed by the girl.

Conflict situations are especially hard for young people. Conflicts dramatize for them how few options they really have in society and how extensively they still depend upon adults for most of their needs. Few teenagers know how to confront someone verbally, and fewer still have the self-assurance that confrontation seems to require.

Comparing the Confrontations of Jeremiah with Those of Today's Young People

One might ask, do the everyday confrontations that today's young people need to make in any way parallel the God-inspired confrontations of a prophet like Jeremiah?

Similarities

In what ways can these constructive confrontations be *similar*?

1. To the extent that a young person's confrontation comes out of a genuine need to express his or her own inner truth, we can say it is like Jeremiah's, because Jeremiah spoke out of a deep conviction of a truth burning within him.
2. When a young person's confrontation is geared to solving a problem or to making a situation better rather than getting revenge or personally attacking someone, we can say it is like Jeremiah's. The prophet's passionate desire was to prevent the ruin of Jerusalem and his people; he was not motivated by hatred.
3. To the extent that a young person has to overcome fear and a dread of another's hostile reactions in order to confront someone, we can say that the confrontation is like Jeremiah's. This prophet felt too young, too frightened, and too unable to find the right words, but he gained courage and confidence with God's help.

Dissimilarities

Obviously, the constructive confrontations of today's young people are not identical with

those of Jeremiah. In what ways can they be *dis-similar*?

1. Jeremiah was convinced of his rightness because he felt his thoughts and convictions were the word of God. On the other hand, young people today—and adults as well—cannot be absolutely sure that they are 100 percent right. Confrontations must be carried out with a spirit of openness to the viewpoints of others. A person can be in touch with her or his inner truth (in a sense, the voice of God within) and be convinced of its validity but also recognize that her or his perspective is not the whole truth.
2. Jeremiah used a style of confrontation—that is, a style of telling people exactly what he thought of them—that could backfire for today's young person in a confrontation. The method of constructive confrontation proposed in this activity is more consistent with the psychology of human relations that is characteristic of our era.
3. Jeremiah's mission was to care for the whole people; he confronted the people because they were heading for ruin and he wanted to prevent that. Young people, on the other hand, are at a stage of development in which most of their confrontations are about caring for themselves or those immediately close to them. They need to learn to speak up directly on behalf of their own rights. This does not preclude young people's confronting others for the sake of the whole community; it simply acknowledges that developmentally, they need to learn to speak up for themselves in order to prepare themselves to speak up with a larger purpose later in life.

A Four-Step Method

To show students that, like Jeremiah, they really have within them the power to cope with their everyday conflicts, this activity offers a method of confrontation to use in rehearsing several simulated conflicts drawn from the students' own lives.

In small groups, the students devise a confrontation based on conflicts submitted anonymously in writing by their classmates. Using a four-step method, they write down exactly what they would say in trying to confront the other person in the description.

Each small group in turn then does a "rehearsal" in front of the whole class by having

one of its members act as the "confronter," who delivers the message to a student (the "confrontee") designated by the teacher.

The steps of a confrontation as described in handout B, "How to Confront: Creating Rehearsals," are the following:

1. Open the conversation in a direct way, indicating that you would like to talk about something important.
2. Describe the action or behavior that is bothering you and how it bothers you, but do not attack or judge the person.
3. Ask the confrontee for a specific change, not a general one.
4. Say something that shows you are interested in the confrontee's point of view.

Here is how the confronter's message might sound in an instance when a young man or woman is confronting a father about not being allowed to go out with friends on weeknights:

- (1) Dad, I need to talk with you about something that is bothering me. (2) I'm having a hard time with this rule that says I can't go out at all on weeknights. I'm the only one of all my friends who can't go out, and it makes me feel embarrassed. (3) May I go out at least a few times at night during the week? (4) It won't make much difference because I stay up until 11 o'clock anyway. What do you think?

Up to this point, the exercise may feel somewhat artificial. Addressed to an anonymous situation through a prescribed method, the group's confrontation may seem detached and theoretical. Also, many students, seeing only one side of a conflict, may expect the confrontee to capitulate immediately. But if the teacher has encouraged the confrontee to role-play a *probable* reaction, the atmosphere can change suddenly when the confrontee comes back with a stereotypical parental reaction:

- Now, I've told you time and time again that the rule holds good for you just as it did for your older brother and sister. You've got to get some studying done, and it's not going to be done in the mall. You can't go out on weeknights because it's your grades that can get you into college, not your friends. Some day you'll thank me. Case closed.

This is the closed door, the rebuff that can spark real feelings and galvanize everyone into trying to find an answer that "works." If the confronting group has not prepared its delegate well, the confronter might simply reword the confrontation with a series of "But Dad . . ." arguments. The teacher may have to throw the confrontation open to the class at large to come up with an answer that resolves the situation. In

any case, whoever can fashion a response that addresses the father's concerns should let the confronter deliver it. The confronter's answer then might go like this:

- Dad, let's make a trade. If I guarantee you that I'll study for two hours twice a week after school, will you let me go out those nights until 9 o'clock? That way, I'll enjoy my friends and you'll see good grades. What do you say?

Since this proposal would probably be acceptable to a reasonable person, it should end the rehearsal. Maybe the real-life dad is not a reasonable person; maybe the real-life son or daughter is not trustworthy enough to carry out the guarantee. But these factors were not included in the original description of the conflict. Maybe the classroom confrontee will not want to relinquish the role of power-wielder, but this should not be allowed to prolong the exercise. Ideally, the teacher should end the rehearsal by congratulating the students for coming up with a constructive way of approaching the confrontation. The process is then repeated for each small group.

These rehearsals and the activity's four-step method of confrontation may give the students some skill at confronting, but the activity's major potential impact is the building of confidence. If the rehearsals promote a general sense of "can do" regarding dealing with conflict, and if each student at some point begins to consider confrontation as a good alternative to the extremes of aggression and submission, the activity will have achieved its goal. What the students may learn is that to defend their convictions effectively they must relate those convictions to the concerns of the people around them.

A Final Word: Jeremiah and "Success"

Although the activity emphasizes the four-step method as a way of more effectively and successfully dealing with a confrontation, it should be noted that Jeremiah himself did not "succeed" in convincing the leaders of Jerusalem to change their ways. His message was consistently rejected, and he never won a popularity contest. He was treated as a traitor by his people. Only later, after the terrible destruction of Jerusalem and the exile, was Jeremiah vindicated.

This perspective is important because it points out that we cannot always expect success

when we stick up for our convictions. We can try to get through to people in every way we know (as Jeremiah did—he wanted to *succeed* at convincing his fellow citizens). But in the final analysis, we may have to choose between faithfulness to our vision of what is right and success.

Procedures

Before the First Session

Before planning for the activity, which consists of two sessions, read the materials that will be used:

- Handout B, "How to Confront: Creating Rehearsals"

The First Session

1. Distribute a 3-by-5-inch index card to each student. Tell them to write the words *Proposed Confrontation* on the card but *not* to write their name on it.

2. Write the word *confront* on the chalkboard. Ask the students what it means. Try to draw out the following connotations:

- Confront* means to engage in a conflict with another person openly and directly, not secretly or indirectly.
- Confront* implies presenting another person with a truth, a feeling, evidence, or an observation.
- Confront* implies opposition to what another person is doing, rather than to the person himself or herself.

Explain that Jeremiah the prophet knew about conflict. He confronted the people of pre-exilic times (c. 609–587 B.C.E.) with what he saw as the truth, namely, that the nation's rulers and elite were unfaithful to Yahweh to the point of being idolatrous, corrupt, and outrageously unjust. He said that the disintegrating nation of Judah, the city of Jerusalem, and the Temple would be ruined if those in power did not change their evil ways. Jeremiah anticipated that Judah's resistance to the attacking Babylonian army would mean that the small, weak country would inevitably be crushed by superior might. He could see that Jerusalem would be destroyed, people would starve, and the Temple would be in ruins if they continued to think foolishly that they could not be conquered.

The people did not want to hear Jeremiah's message, and he feared their hostility. They treated him as a criminal even though later his

prophetic warnings were proven right. Jeremiah courageously confronted the people because he believed in his own inner truth, which was for him the voice of God.

Tell the students that this activity will be about their own everyday conflict situations where they would like to be able to confront people in ways that would improve the situations.

3. Ask the students to describe on their index card a situation in their own life in which they would like to confront someone. They should also explain why they are reluctant to confront that someone.

Often when students are asked to write something creative or personal, it is necessary to prime the pump of their imaginations. If such is the case with your class, here is one way to go about it: Hold up a sheet of plain, white, unmarked paper. Say to the class the following:

- Imagine your life as a piece of paper. For your life to be as perfect as this unblemished piece of paper, you must have everything in your life exactly as you want it. Very few of us have a perfect life like this. (Make a scribble on the paper.) There is usually some little thing that isn't quite the way we want it. Some of us have a lot of little things that aren't the way we want them. (Make some wild scrawls and a perforation or two.) And some of us even feel that our life is like this. (Crumple up the paper.)

Now think about how this paper of your life gets marked and wrinkled. Most of it is probably your own fault. But isn't there at least a small part of this imperfection that seems to be coming from what someone else is doing? Who is it that is marking up your life? No names, please!

I want you to write down on your index card one of the situations in your life that isn't the way you want it to be. Describe the person in that situation whom you would like to *confront* and what that person is doing. Also, write why you are a little afraid or reluctant to confront that person.

You must absolutely conceal the identity of the person you are describing.

4. As the students finish, have them bring their index card up to your desk. Quickly check the index cards and discard any you deem inappropriate. (To implement the small-group activity, you need to be able to use three out of four

cards—enough so that each small group of four students will have about three situations to choose from.) Then shuffle the cards to mix them up.

5. Distribute to each student a copy of handout B, "How to Confront: Creating Rehearsals." Read with them the "Introduction" and the "What to Do" sections.

6. One way to give the students an advance feeling for their rehearsals is to work through, rather than read through, the four-step confrontation method with them. To do this, you could use the fictional situation that follows or another of your choosing. Use the whole class as a collective confronter (the player) and choose one student to role-play the confrontee (the coach). First, just read the situation to the students.

- The varsity coach [your choice—football, baseball, basketball, etc.] is using his [her] own son [daughter] on the team's starting lineup. Judging by team practices, you think you are a better player. Because you are a senior, it is your last chance to play, but you are on the bench. It's early in the season. If you want to see any action, you had better say something to the coach now.

Tell the class that, as a group, they will be the player (confronter) in this situation.

7. The student whom you pick to role-play the coach should be someone who can improvise well and who would be likely to react in a reasonable and realistic manner. (You might choose from among volunteers.) Avoid picking any student who would resist out of pure contrariness all confrontational efforts by another student. Also avoid anyone who might be too accommodating and understanding. Select the "coach" before leading the class through the steps in the "Four-Step Method" section of the handout.

8. Using the whole class as a collective confronter, try out each of the four confrontation steps on your newly chosen coach:

- *Step 1:* "Open the conversation in a direct way, indicating that you would like to talk about something important." Ask the class what they would say to get the coach's attention. Then try out some of their suggestions on the coach. If the coach acts his or her role well, he or she will force the class-as-player to contrive a verbal hook that would get attention from even a busy or pressured person. If the player's opening is rather casual, the coach may say, "Not now; I'm busy," or "What do you want? Make it quick"—just the kinds of

responses that would happen in real life. If this happens, draw from the class a rejoinder like "This is serious. When can we talk?" or "I've got a heavy problem to discuss."

- *Step 2:* "Describe the action or behavior that is bothering you and how it bothers you, but do not attack or judge the person." According to the formula on the handout, the correct way to confront the coach would be something like this: "Coach, your assigning me to the bench in my senior year is a real disappointment for me. I also feel discriminated against, because I know I can play better than at least one of the starting players."

Realistically, the coach would be likely to react either by verbally attacking the player or by putting the player off with some vague statement. If your classroom coach attacks the player and enumerates all of his or her performance limitations, encourage the player to counter with a list of achievements and past improvements. If necessary, you could also advise the player to appeal to the coach's sense of "what's best for the team." Defending the player at this point and keeping alive his or her chances of succeeding with the coach is important for impressing the students with the real-life possibilities of confrontation.

It will become evident to the students, as they grapple with the situation, that confronting is a slippery business that does not conform well to any prescribed formula. The confronter must stay flexible and conversant.

- *Step 3:* "Ask the confrontee for a specific change, not a general one." Given the changing circumstances of competitive athletics, about the most specific anyone could get in this situation would be, "Coach, I'd like a chance to prove myself as a starter."
- *Step 4:* "Say something that shows you are interested in the confrontee's point of view." This step is intended to draw out information that could help the confronter put the problem in perspective. For example, "What problems do you have with putting me in as a starter?"

9. Read through the handout's sample confrontation so that the students can see a concise example of the four-step method in use.

10. Divide the class into groups of three or four. Give each group three of the "proposed confrontation" index cards that the students

anonymously filled out at the beginning of the session. Remind them not to bother trying to guess who wrote the confrontations. Then let the students follow the directions on the handout.

11. While the groups are working:

- a. Check on each group at least once to spot any problems.
- b. Place a chair at the front of the room facing the class for the confrontee to sit in.
- c. For purposes of evaluating each group's confrontation, write this sentence on the front chalkboard: Did the confrontation work?

12. As soon as the first group is ready to present their confrontation, ask them for the card they have been working on. Find a student from another group who is willing to role-play as the confrontee, and give that student the card. Let her or him have a minute or two to read the proposed confrontation and to *imagine the confrontee's probable reaction* to being challenged or confronted in any way. Have the confrontee take the seat at the front of the class.

13. Call the first group's confronter forward, read the proposed confrontation to the class, and let the confrontation begin. With all the preparation that has gone into it, the confrontation should pretty much direct itself. All you have to do is encourage the confrontee to react realistically.

If the confronter gets stuck, he or she may go back to the small group for a moment's consultation. If the small group just does not know how to sway the confrontee, you can ask the rest of the class for suggestions. You may get several. You can allow all those with suggestions to have a brief huddle with the confronter during which she or he may select the best of the suggestions.

Whenever the confrontee comes up with a sincere response to the concerns of the confronter, you should end the rehearsal. If you can presume that a reasonable person would be in some way persuaded by the confronter's argument, then the confrontation has been effective.

To obtain a quick evaluation of the rehearsal, call for a show of hands in answer to the question on the chalkboard: Did the confrontation work?

14. Completing one small group's rehearsal of a confrontation in front of the class should take about five or ten minutes. However, if a conflict is particularly challenging for the confronter, it may require that he or she consider several alternative approaches and try them out. Allow the time that is needed for each group's

rehearsal, but keep the process from getting bogged down.

Complete as many groups' rehearsals as you can in the first session.

The Second Session

1. Finish all of the small-group rehearsals in the first part of the second session. After the last rehearsal, ask the students to list the ingredients of a confrontation that works. In addition to the four steps of the method described in their hand-out, the students may come up with additional ingredients learned from the rehearsals.

2. To conclude, bring the focus back to the confrontations made by Jeremiah the prophet. Ask the students to compare their confrontations to Jeremiah's experiences confronting the people of his day. You may use the material in the teacher's background under the sections "Comparing the Confrontations of Jeremiah with Those of Today's Young People" and "A Final Word: Jeremiah and 'Success'" in guiding the dis-

cussion. Two passages from the Book of Jeremiah are notable:

- a. Jeremiah did not just *decide* to be confrontational; God's word came into his heart as an impulse he could hardly resist:

. . . It becomes like fire burning in my heart,
imprisoned in my bones;
I grow weary holding it in,
I cannot endure it.

(Jer. 20:9)

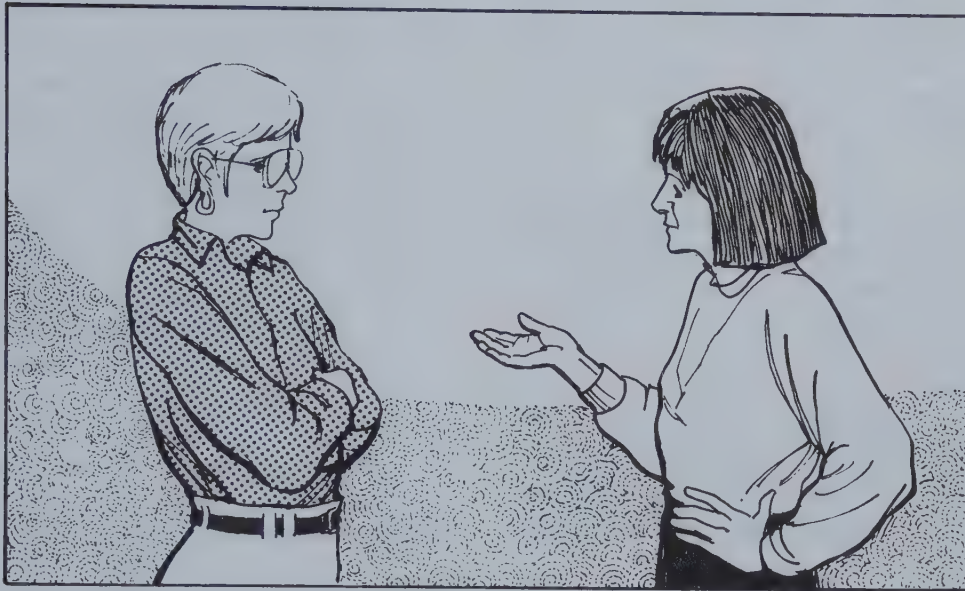
- b. Jeremiah did not just stick up for his own rights; he spoke up for the common good:

Who will pity you, Jerusalem,
who will console you?
Who will stop to ask
about your welfare?

(Jer. 15:5)

The activity could end with a reading of Jer. 1:4-19.

How to Confront: Creating Rehearsals



Introduction

The teacher will give your small group some “proposed confrontation” cards that describe real conflict situations in the personal lives of some of your classmates. Each card describes the behavior of someone who is bothering the person who wrote the card. Do not try to figure out who wrote the card.

Your small group will pick one of the cards and decide how to confront the person it describes and work at resolving the conflict.

Later on in the session, when your group is ready, we will rehearse your confrontation by having one of your group try it out on a student from another group. We will call the other student the “confrontee,” and the student from your group the “confronter.” You have no way of knowing who the confrontee will be or how the confrontee will react, so you and your group will have to be ready for anything.

What to Do

In your small group:

1. Read the cards that the teacher gives you. As a group, pick the card you want to work on.
2. Decide together *exactly what to say* to the person described on your card. To do this:
 - a. Use all four steps in the method given below.
 - b. Have one person in the group write the confrontation down word-for-word. (Whoever writes it will not have to present it.)
3. Choose a confronter to deliver the confrontation in front of the class. This person will do two things:
 - a. Read the group’s confrontation to the confrontee chosen by the teacher.
 - b. On the spot, come up with an answer (or several answers) to the confrontee’s reaction.
4. As a group, try to foresee how the confrontee will react and coach your confronter before the rehearsal. You also may need to coach the confronter during the rehearsal itself.

A Four-Step Method

1. Open the conversation in a direct way, indicating that you would like to talk about something important. For instance: "Do you have a few minutes? I need to talk with you about something" or "I've got a problem I need to talk over with you."
2. Describe the action or behavior that is bothering you and how it bothers you, but do not attack or judge the person. One way to accomplish this is to use the XYZ formula. Just say, "Whenever you do X in situation Y , I feel Z ."
- This step is the heart of the confrontation and the hardest part to do well. The best way to do it is to avoid saying "you are" (as in "you are annoying"), and concentrate on saying "I feel" (as in "I feel annoyed").
3. Ask the confrontee for a specific change, not a general one. Instead of saying, "You'd better start shaping up, or I'm dropping out of this ride service," say, "If I'm going to stay in this ride service, I need for you to pick me up by 7:15 a.m. at the latest."
4. Say something that shows you are interested in the confrontee's point of view. Don't assume that the confrontee's behavior has been just an expression of meanness or stupidity; maybe there has been a very good reason for it. Also, the only way to resolve a conflict is to find out what the other person is thinking. Say, "How do you feel about this?" or "Got any ideas?" or something like that.

Sample Confrontation

Proposed Confrontation Card

Suppose that a proposed confrontation card describes the following situation:

I can't stand the senior who runs my ride service. She's always late, and I'm paying enough money for this. It's not fair for me to keep getting trouble from my teachers and administrators just because she can't get out of bed on time. This is only my first year here, but I'm already off to a bad start because of her. I'd love to tell her off, but she'd probably say something sarcastic or tell me I can find another driver. Where I live there isn't much transportation, and I have to be on my way by 7:15.

One Approach

Here is one way a person might approach the situation (the numbers correspond to the four steps listed above):

(1) I'm having ride problems. Have you got a minute to talk about it? (2) Any morning that we get to school late I get into trouble. Last week we were late three times, and the week before, two times. I feel cheated because I'm paying for this ride service. (3) I need to be picked up by 7:15 at the latest. (4) What do you think—can it be done?



FOR FURTHER READING

- Alt, Albrecht. *Essays on Old Testament History and Religion*. New York: Doubleday, 1967.
- Anchor Bible Series. 32 volumes on the Old Testament, some in preparation. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964-.
- Anderson, Bernhard W. *Understanding the Old Testament*. 4th ed. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1986.
- Bright, John. *A History of Israel*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1959.
- Carroll, Robert P. *Jeremiah: A Commentary*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986.
- Eban, Abba. *Heritage: Civilization and the Jews*. New York: Summit Books, 1984.
- Eissfeldt, Otto. *The Old Testament: An Introduction*. New York: Harper and Row, 1965.
- Ellis, Peter. *The Men and the Message of the Old Testament*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1963.
- Flanders, Henry Jackson, Jr., et al. *People of the Covenant: An Introduction to the Old Testament*. 3d ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.
- Gottwald, Norman K. *The Hebrew Bible: A Socio-literary Introduction*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985.
- Hayes, John H., and J. Maxwell Miller, eds. *Israelite and Judaeon History*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977.
- Herrmann, Siegfried. *A History of Israel in Old Testament Times*. Rev. ed. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980.
- Heschel, Abraham. *The Prophets: An Introduction*. New York: Harper and Row, 1962.
- Keller, Werner. *The Bible as History*. New York: William Morrow and Co., 1956.
- Kuntz, J. Kenneth. *The People of Ancient Israel*. New York: Harper and Row, 1974.
- McKenzie, John L. *Dictionary of the Bible*. New York: Macmillan, 1965.
- Orlinsky, Harry M. *Understanding the Bible Through History and Archeology*. New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1972.
- Pfeiffer, Robert H. *Introduction to the Old Testament*. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1941.
- Senior, Donald, and Carroll Stuhlmueller. *The Biblical Foundation for Mission*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983.
- Vawter, Bruce. *The Conscience of Israel: Pre-exilic Prophets and Prophecy*. New York: Sheed and Ward, 1961.
- Von Rad, Gerhard. *The Message of the Prophets*. New York: Harper and Row, 1965.
- . *Old Testament Theology*. Volume 1. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1962.

Strategies for Teaching the Hebrew Scriptures

Shawn Michael Smith

This series of teaching manuals and handouts on eight topics of the Hebrew Scriptures takes an innovative approach to teaching high school students about the roots of their religious tradition. Challenging, in-depth activities are intended to plunge the students into the issues and mindset of the ancient Israelites. Through group experiences, students learn of the dynamic process through which the people of God were formed and the Scriptures came to be, and they begin to see how that process relates to their own adolescent concerns and their struggles toward maturity.

The eight teaching manuals include numerous handouts, and the activities for the whole series cover a total of thirty to forty hours of classroom time.

Shawn Michael Smith holds an M.A. in religious studies and an M.A. in English. He has taught the Hebrew Scriptures and English at the high school level.

Titles in the Series and Activities for Each Title

Exploring Abraham	ISBN 0-88489-213-1
Imagining the Call of Abraham	
Exploring the Law of Moses	ISBN 0-88489-214-X
Reliving Israelite Trials	
Exploring Joshua	ISBN 0-88489-215-8
Debating God's Will at Jericho	
Broadening Viewpoints on God's Role in Competitions	
Exploring the Judges	ISBN 0-88489-216-6
Comparing Biblical Judges to U.S. Frontier Fighters	
Seeing the Judges as Heroes in the Valley of Bones	
Exploring Saul, David, and Solomon	ISBN 0-88489-217-4
Re-electing Israel's First Three Kings	
Identifying with the Kings as Personalities	
Exploring Jeremiah	ISBN 0-88489-218-2
Seeing Through the Eyes of Jeremiah the Prophet	
Rehearsing Real-life Confrontations	
Exploring the Exile in Babylon	ISBN 0-88489-219-0
Making Choices in Exile	
Exploring the Wisdom Books	ISBN 0-88489-220-4
Sleuthing the Context of the Book of Proverbs	
Dice-rolling with Job for the Future	

\$39.60 for the series

4.95 for each book

Saint Mary's Press
Christian Brothers Publications
Winona, Minnesota